The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

"Why? What's going on at the judge's?"

"Goin' on! Didn't you see that strange lady at the lecture with Minnie Briscoe and the judge and old Fisbee?"

"I'm afraid not, Bowlder."

"They couldn't talk about anything else at the postoffice this mornin' and at Tom Martin's. She come yesterday on the afternoon accommodation. You ought to know all about it because when Minnie and her father went to the deepoe they had old Fisbee with 'em, and when the buckboard come through town he was settin' on the back seat with her. That's what stirred the town up so. Nobody could figger it out any way, and nobody got much of a good look at her then except Judd Bennett. He said she had kind of a new look to her. That's all any of 'em could git out of Judd. He was in a sort of a dreamy state. But Mildy Upton— You know Mildy? She works out at Briscoe's"—

"Yes, I know Mildy."

"She come in to the postoffice with the news this lady's name was Sherwood and she lives at Rouen. Miss Tibbs says that wasn't no news—you could tell she was a city lady with both your eyes shut. But Mildy says Fisbee was goin' to stay for supper, and he come to the lecture with 'em and drove off with 'em afterwerds. Sol Tibbs says he reckoned it was because Fisbee was the only man in Carlow that Briscoes thought had read enough books to be smart enough to talk to her, but Miss Seliny says if that was so they'd have got you instead, and so they had to all jest about give it up. Of course everybody got a good look at her at the lecture—they set on the platform right behind you and Halloway, and she did look smart. What got me, though, was the way she wore a kind of a little dagger stuck straight through her head. Seemed a good deal of a sacrifice jest to make sure your hat was on right. You never see her at all?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Harkless absently. "Miss Briscoe stopped me on the way out and told me she had a visitor."

"Young man," said Bowlder, "you better go out there right away." He raised the reins and clucked to the gray mare. "Well, *she'll* be mad I ain't in town for her long ago. Ride in with me."

"No, thank you. I'll walk in for the sake of my appetite."

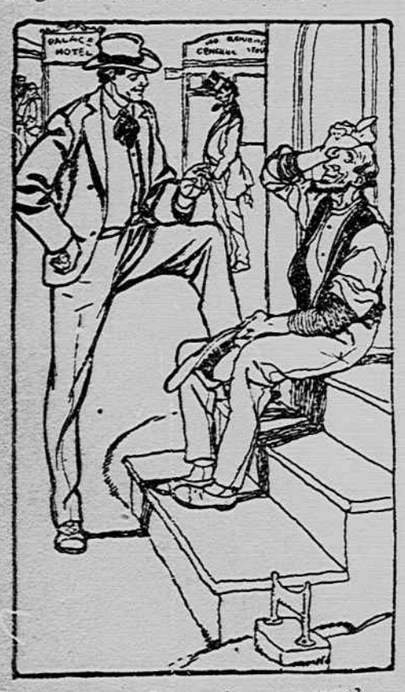
"Wouldn't encourage it too much—livin' at the Palace hotel," observed Bowlder. "Sorry you won't ride." He gathered the loose ends of the reins in his hands, leaned far over the dashboard and struck the mare a hearty thwack. The tattered banner of tail jerked indignantly, but she consented to move down the road. Bowlder thrust his big head through the sun curtain behind him and continued the conversation. "See the White Caps ain't got you yet."

"No, not yet," Harkless laughed.

"Reckon the boys 'druther you stayed in town after dark," the other called back. "Well, come out and see us if you git any spare time from the judge's." He laughed loudly again in farewell, and the editor waved his hand as Bowlder finally turned his attention forward to the mare. When the flop, flop of her hoofs had died out, Harkless realized that the day was silent no longer; it was verging into evening.

He dropped from the fence and turned his face toward town and supper. He felt the life and light about him, heard the clatter of the blackbirds above him, heard the homing bees hum by, saw the vista of white road and level landscape framed on two sides by the branches of the grove, a vista of infinitely stretching fields of green, lined here and there with woodlands and flat to the horizon line, the village lying in their lap. No roll of meadow, no rise of pasture land, relieved their serenity nor shouldered up from them to be called a hill.

A farm bell rang in the distance, a tinkling coming small and mellow from far away, and at the lonesomeness of that sound he heaved a long, mournful sigh. The next instant he broke into laughter, for another bell rang over the



He stopped to exchange a word.

fields, the courthouse bell in the square. The first four strokes were given with mechanical regularity, the pride of the custodian who operated the bell being to produce the effect of a clockwork bell, such as he had once heard in the courthouse at Rouen, but the fifth and sixth strokes were halting achievements, as, after 4 o'clock he often lost count in the strain of the effort for precise imitation. There was a pause after the sixth; then a dubious and reluctant stroke, seven; a longer pause, followed by a final ring with desperate decision—eight! Harkless looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes of 6.

As he crossed the courthouse yard to the Palace hotel on his way to supper he stopped to exchange a word with the bell ringer, who, seated on the steps, was mopping his brow with an air of hard earned satisfaction.

"Good evening, Schofields'," he said. "You came in strong on the last stroke tonight."

"What we need here," responded the bell ringer, "is more public sperrited men. I ain't kickin' on you, Mr. Harkless—no, sir; but we want more men like they got in Rouen. We want men that 'll git Main street paved with block or asphalt; men that 'll put in factories; men that 'll act—not set round like that old fool Martin and laugh and pollywoggle along and make fun of public sperrit, day in, day out. I reckon I do my best for the city."

"Oh, nobody minds old Tom Martin," observed Harkless. "It's only half the time he means anything by what he says."

"That's just what I hate about him," returned the bell ringer in a tone of high complaint. "You can't never tell which half it is. Look at him now!" The gentleman referred to was standing over in front of the hotel talking to a row of coatless loungers, who sat with their chairs tilted back against the props of the wooden awning that projected over the sidewalk. Their faces were turned toward the courthouse, and even those lost in meditative whittling had looked up to laugh. Mr. Martin, one of his hands thrust in a pocket of his alpaca coat and the other softly caressing his wiry, gray chin beard, his rusty silk hat tilted forward till the brim almost rested on the bridge of his nose, was addressing them in a one keyed voice, the melancholy whine of which, though not the words, penetrated to the courthouse steps.

The bell ringer, whose name was Henry Schofield, but who was known as Schofields' Henry (popularly abbreviated to Schofields'), was moved to indignation. "Look at him!" he cried. "Look at him! Everlastingly goin' on about my bell! Well, let him talk. Let him talk!"

As Mr. Martin's eye fell upon the editor, who, having bade the bell ringer good night, was approaching the hotel, he left his languid companions and crossed the street to meet him.

"I was only oratin' on how proud the city ought to be of Schofields'," he said mournfully as they shook hands; "but he looks kind of put out with me." He hooked his arm in that of the young man and detained him for a moment as the supper gong sounded from within the hotel. "Call on the judge tonight?" he asked.

"No. Why?"

"I reckon you didn't see that lady with Minnie last night."

"No."

"Well, I guess you better go out there, young man. She might not stay here long."

CHAPTER II.

THE Briscoe buckboard rattled along the elastic country road, the roans setting a sharp pace as they turned eastward on the pike toward home.

"They'll make the eight miles in three-quarters of an hour," said Judge Briscoe proudly. He turned from his daughter at his side to Miss Sherwood, who sat with Mr. Fisbee behind them, and pointed ahead with his whip. "Just beyond that bend we pass through Six Crossroads."

Miss Sherwood leaned forward eagerly. "What did you mean last night after the lecture," she said to Fisbee, "when you asked Mr. Martin who was to be with Mr. Harkless?"

"Who was watching him," he answered.

"Watching him? I don't understand."

"Yes; they have shot at him from the woods at night, and"—

"But who watches him?"

"The young men of the town. He has a habit of taking long walks after dark, and he is heedless of all remonstrance, so the young men have organized a guard for him, and every evening one of them follows him until he goes to the office to work for the night. It is a different young man each night, and the watcher follows at a distance, so that he does not suspect."

"But how many people know of this arrangement?"

"Nearly every one in the county except the Crossroads people, though it is not improbable that they have discovered it."

"And has no one told him?"

"No; he would not allow it to continue. He will not even arm himself."

"They follow and watch him night after night, and every one knows and no one tells him? Oh, I must say," cried the girl, "I think these are good people!"

The buckboard turned the bend in the road, and they entered a squalid settlement built raggedly about a blacksmith shop and a saloon. "I'd hate to have a breakdown here," Briscoe remarked quietly.

Half a dozen shanties clustered near the forge, a few roofs scattered through the shiftlessly cultivated fields, four or five barns propped by fence rails, some sheds with gaping apertures through which the light glanced from side to side, a squad of thin razorback hogs, now and then worried by gaunt hounds, and some abused looking hens groping about disconsolately in the mire, a broken topped buggy with a twisted wheel, setting into the mud of the middle of the road (there was always abundant mud here in the driest summer); a dim face sneering from a broken window—Six Crossroads was forbidding and forlorn enough by day. The thought of what might issue from it by night was unpleasant, and the legends of the Crossroads, together with an unshapen threat easily fancied in the atmosphere of the place, made Miss Sherwood shiver as though a cold draft had crossed her.

"It is so sinister!" she exclaimed. "And so unspeakably mean! This is where they live, the people that hate him, is it? The White Caps?"

"They call themselves that," replied Briscoe. "Usually White Caps are a vigilance committee in a region where the law isn't enforced. These fellows aren't that kind. They got together to wipe out grudges, and sometimes didn't need any grudge—just made their raids for pure devilment. There's a feud between us and them that goes back into pioneer days, and only a few of us old folks know much about it."

"And he was the first to try to stop them?"

"Well, you see, our folks are pretty long suffering," said Briscoe apologetically. "We'd sort of got used to the meanness of the Crossroads. It took a stranger to stir things up, and he did. He sent eight of them to the penitentiary, some for twenty years."

As they passed the saloon a man stepped into the doorway and looked at them. He was coatless and clad in garments worn to the color of dust. His bare head was curiously malformed, higher on one side than on the other, and though the buckboard passed rapidly and at a distance this singular lopsidedness was plainly visible to the occupants, lending an ugly significance to his meager, yellow face. He was tall, lean, hard, powerfully built. He eyed the strangers with affected languor and then, when they had gone by, broke into sudden loud laughter.

"That was Bob Skillett, the worst of the lot," said the judge. "Harkless sent his son and one brother to prison, and it nearly broke his heart that he couldn't swear to Bob."

When they were beyond the village and in the open road again Miss Sherwood took a deep breath. "I think I breathe more freely. That was a hideous laugh he sent after us."

The judge glanced at his guest's face and chuckled. "I guess we won't frighten you much," he said. "Young lady, I don't believe you'd be afraid of many things, would you? You don't look like it. Besides, the Crossroads isn't Plattville, and the White Caps have been too scared to do anything much except try to get even with the Herald for the last two years—ever since it went for them. They're laying for Harkless partly for revenge and partly because they daren't do anything until he's out of the way."

The girl gave a low cry with a sharp intake of breath. "Ah, one grows tired of this everlasting American patience! Why don't the Plattville people do something before they"—

"It's just as I say," Briscoe answered. "Our folks are sort of used to them. I expect we do about all we can. The boys look after him nights, but the main trouble is that we can't make him understand he ought to be more afraid of them. If he'd lived here all his life he would be. If they get him there'll be trouble of an illegal nature." He broke off suddenly and nodded to a little old man in a buckboard turning off from the road into a farm lane which led up to a trim cottage with a honeysuckle vine by the door. "That's Mrs. Wimby's husband," said the judge in an undertone.

Miss Sherwood observed that Mrs. Wimby's husband was remarkable for the exceeding plaintiveness of his expression. He was a weazened, blank, pale eyed little man, with a thin white mist of neck whisker, and he was dressed in clothes much too large for him. No more inoffensive figure than this feeble little old man could be imagined, yet his was the distinction of having received a hostile visit from his neighbors of the Crossroads. A vagabonding tinker, he had married the one respectable person of the section, a widow, who had refused several gentlemen at the Crossroads, and so complete was the bridegroom's insignificance that to all the world his own name was lost. The bride continued to be known by her former name as "Mrs. Wimby," and her spouse was usually called "Widder Woman Wimby's husband" or "Mr. Wimby." The bride supplied his wardrobe with the garments of her former husband, and, alleging this proceeding as the cause of their anger, the White Caps broke into the farmhouse one night, tore the old man from his bed and before his wife's eyes lashed him with sapling shoots till he was near to death. A little yellow cur that had followed his master on his wanderings was found licking the old man's wounds, and they deluged the dog with kerosene and then threw the poor animal upon a bonfire they had made and danced around in heartiest enjoyment.

The man recovered, but that was no palliation of the offense to the mind of a hot eyed young man from the east who was besieging the county authorities for redress and writing brimstone and saltpeter for his paper. The powers of the county proving either lackadaisical or timorous, he appealed to those of the state, and he went every night to sleep at a farmhouse the own-

[illegible] received a warning from the White Caps, and one night it [illegible] that he was rewarded, for the raiders attempted an entrance. He and the farmer and the farmer's sons beat off the marauders and did a satisfactory amount of damage in return. Two of the White Caps they captured and bound, and others they recognized. Then the state authorities hearkened to the voice of the Herald and its owner. There were arrests, and in the course of time there was a trial. Every prisoner proved an alibi—could have proved a dozen—but the editor of the Herald, after virtually conducting the prosecution, went upon the stand and swore to man after man. Eight men went to the penitentiary on his evidence, five of them for twenty years. The Plattville brass band serenaded the editor of the Herald again.

There were no more raids, and the Six Crossroads men who were left kept to their hovels, appalled and shaken, but as time went by and left them unmolested they recovered a measure of their hardiness and began to think on what they should do to the man who had brought misfortune and terror upon them. For a long time he had been publishing their threatening letters and warnings in a column which he headed "Humor of the Day."

When the Briscoe buckboard had left the Crossroads far behind and had come in sight of Plattville Mr. Briscoe's visitor turned to Fisbee with a repetition of the shiver that the laughter of Mr. Skillett had caused her and said half under her breath, "I wish—I half wish—that we had not driven through there." She clasped Mr. Fisbee's hand gently. His eyes shone. He touched her fingers with a strange, shy reverence.

"You will meet him tomorrow," he said softly.

She laughed and pressed his hand. "I'm afraid not. I was almost at his side last night when Minnie asked him to call on me. He wasn't even interested enough to look at me."

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Something over two hours later, as Mr. Tom Martin was putting things to rights in his domain, the Dry Goods Emporium, previous to his departure for the evening's gossip and checkers at the drug store, he stumbled over something soft lying on the floor behind a counter. The thing rose and would have evaded him, but he put out his hands and pinioned it and dragged it to the show window, where the light of the fading day defined his capture. The capture shrieked and squirmed and fought earnestly. Grasped by the shoulder, he held a lean, fierce eyed, undersized girl of fourteen clad in one ragged cotton garment, unless the coat of dust she wore over all might be esteemed another. Her cheeks were sallow, and her brow was already shrewdly lined, and her eyes were as hypocritical as they were savage. She was very thin and little, but old Tom's brown face grew a shade nearer white when the light fell upon her.

"You're no Plattville girl," he said sharply.

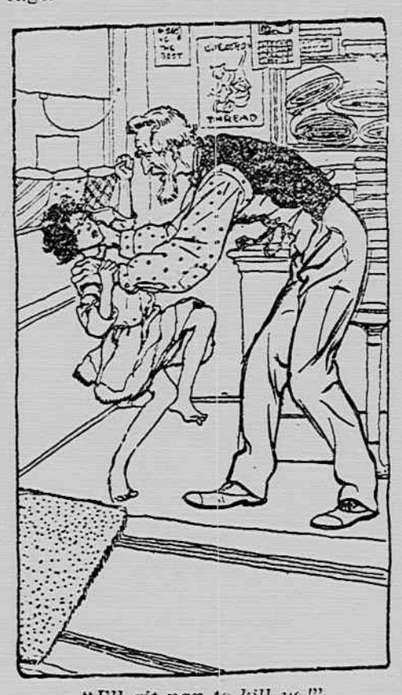
"You lie!" cried the child. "You lie! I am! You leave me go, will you? I'm lookin' fer pap, and you're a liar!"

"You crawled in here to sleep after your seven mile walk, didn't you?" Martin went on.

"You're a liar!" she screamed.

"Look here," said Martin slowly, "you go back to Six Crossroads and tell your folks that if anything happens to a hair of Mr. Harkless' head every shanty in your town will burn, and your grandfather, and your father, and your uncles, and your brothers, and your cousins, and your second cousins, and your third cousins will never have the good luck to see the penitentiary. Reckon you can remember that message? But before I let you go to carry it I guess you might as well hand out the paper they sent you over here with."

His prisoner fell into a paroxysm of rage.



"I'll git pap to kill ye!"

"I'll git pap to kill ye!" she shrieked, striking at him. "I don't know nothin' 'bout yer Six Crossroads, ner no papers, ner yer Mr. Harkels neither, ner you, ye razorbacked ole devil. Pap 'll kill ye! Leave me go! Leave me go! Pap 'll kill ye! I'll git him to kill ye!" Suddenly her struggles ceased, her eyes closed, her tense little muscles relaxed, and she drooped toward the floor. The old man shifted his grip to support her, and in an instant she twisted out of his hands and sprang out of reach, her eyes shining with triumph and venom.

"Yahay, Mr. Razorback!" she shrilled. "How's that fer high? Pap 'll kill ye Sunday! Ye'll be screechin' in hell in a week, an' we 'ull set up an' drink our applejack an' laff!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The baby does more to cut down the business of the divorce courts than all the grown people combined.—Dallas News.